

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Pentecost, October 29, 2023.**

You and I, in this setting and beyond, have a really special relationship with Jesus. Maybe that relationship is curiosity. You have to admit, he is a really interesting individual. Maybe the relationship is gratitude. If that whole sequence of events is true, “Thank you, Lord” is certainly appropriate. And maybe the relationship is dedication. I want to follow. I want to share whatever gifts I have in a manner that would please Jesus. Not just a thank-you, but “Here I am. Send me.”

For some, these three elements – curiosity, gratitude and dedication – enter our lives in that very sequence. For others, the sequence might be different. Maybe dedication comes first. And, as that dedication begins to turn our lives in a more positive direction, we say “Thank you, Lord.” And then maybe we begin to wonder about the whole purpose of life. What is it about dedication and gratitude that make life really special?

I guess what I’m saying is that this first century carpenter is really stimulating. He makes us think. And sometimes that thinking leads to probability. And probability sometimes leads to conviction. And sometimes mental conviction leads to concrete action. And here we are. Somewhere along that life-line.

Now, if truth be told, curiosity, gratitude and dedication aren’t the only results of engaging Jesus. Curiosity might be short-lived. “Who cares? He’s an unmarried carpenter with a Savior complex.” So, what’s to be thankful for? And if he’s not worth thanking, why even engage him at any level? “I have better things to do with my life than trying to understand this guy.”

But, is that really true, that we have better things to do? Well, sure it is, if Jesus is not who he says he is. If you and I knew for certain that Jesus was not the Son of God, St. Christopher-by-the-Sea would have had a short life, not the on-going 100 year life of which we are a part.

No, I suspect, I believe, that Jesus is exactly – note the present tense - who he claims to be. It’s called Faith, grounded in experience. Shaky at times, to be sure, but resilient, really resilient.

Resilience. The ability to bounce back. Including the ability to bounce back from disappointment in general and from shaky faith in particular. Is resilience – the ability to bounce back - a given, or is it learned? And, if given, by whom? And, if learned, who is the teacher? One's own experience or the experience of others or some kind of combination? Or might it be a gift from God? What Paul describes in today's Epistle as "like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children."

Probably a combination of many sources, some of which, if not all of which, are gifts from God.

You and I in this setting certainly see resilience as a gift from God. The same God who gave us freedom to obey or disobey, to maintain faith or let it lapse.

That's a huge question, isn't it? Do I stick with the program or back off? Do I dig deeper in support of the program – that would be Jesus – or do I share my energies with other programs? Should Jesus be at center of my life, or on the perimeter, or not at all?

Well, maybe, just maybe, we're working too hard at this whole faith business. Maybe we're letting Jesus get under our skin rather than thanking him for entering our hearts.

God didn't re-enter human life in Jesus to complicate things, but to clarify things. "Love God and love neighbor." It is a pretty simple concept. Not hard to understand. Now, not always easy to implement, but pretty easy to understand.

You and I are blessed with certain gifts. All of us! Every single person here this morning. These gifts, our gifts, vary considerably, but they share a common purpose. Make someone happy, by what we do, what we say, what we demonstrate, what we value.

"Make someone happy" is a popular song. The key phrase is "Love is the answer." Now, I'm sure that Jimmy Durante, who made this song famous, didn't have Jesus in mind. But, if the lyric fits, if there's an opportunity to make someone happy or relieved or honored or special, go for it.

That's all God is asking of us. As God loves us in Christ, let us share the love. It's what we do right here, and it's what God hopes we will do are out there. We're not supposed to sit on a goldmine. We're supposed to be miners. To be conscious extenders, not cautious sitters. From today's passage from Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians: "So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us." (**I Thessalonians 2:7**)

Key phrase here? "Determined to share." Which takes us back to "curiosity, gratitude, and dedication."

We were **curious**. Our curiosity was rewarded with the Good News of Jesus, for which we are **grateful**. And not just grateful in the abstract, but **dedicated** to sharing our gratitude.

And here we are. A team of volunteers for Christ. With a little nudge from Jimmy Durante. "Make someone happy, make just one person happy."

When we leave today, we will encounter others. Maybe one person at a time. Maybe a group. Doesn't matter. Whatever the size, an opportunity will present itself to make somebody's day a little happier.

Knowing this group, making someone happy is second-nature to you. And it is also a source of happiness for you. And that's not by accident. That's how things are meant to be. That's why, by whatever means Jesus entered our lives, we now have a duty, a privilege, a joy, to share the Love of God in Christ Jesus.

The Risen Christ is not ours to hoard, but to pass on. Not because we have to, but because we want to. This kind of community is a really good place for people. It is so for you and me – we're here after all – and it can be so for others. Of course, the Risen Christ himself might pay a surprise visit to one who is looking for consolation and challenge. Indeed that direct God to individual method might be our experience. It was the experience of the Pharisees in today's gospel: "What do you think of the Messiah?" (**Matthew 22:42**)

But, I suspect, that the preferred method of the Risen Christ is for you and me to be a spokesperson, by how we live, how we engage, how we handle disappointment, how we celebrate, how we give thanks. Today's Psalm suggests that we "are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season."  
**(Psalm 1:2)**

However we share the Lord puts a smile on the Lord's face. And if that sharing holds for another 100 years, there will be a smile that simply won't quit. Which isn't a bad definition of the Creator.

Amen.

## Lessons for October 29, 2023 – 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**Collect:** Almighty God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

### Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord. You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

### Psalm 1

Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked,  
*nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats of the scornful!*  
Their delight is in the law of the Lord,  
*and they meditate on his law day and night.*  
They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season,  
with leaves that do not wither;  
*everything they do shall prosper.*  
It is not so with the wicked;  
*they are like chaff which the wind blows away.*  
Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright when judgment comes,  
*nor the sinner in the council of the righteous.*  
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
*but the way of the wicked is doomed.*

## **Second Reading: I Thessalonians 2:1-8**

You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with word of flattery or with a pretext for greed; nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

## **Gospel: Matthew 22:34-46**

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Now, while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David, by the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"?' If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

The Gospel of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

